

## Few Experiences Can Compare With Shortgrass Drouth

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MERTZON — If this is spring, and not just a continuance of the past winter, it is the driest spring season since modern man came to the Shortgrass Country. In seven months we've had one rain. That was March 19, when ½ to 1 inch brightened the trunks of old grass and caused a few mouse-eared weeds to poke up in the low spots. Though local citizens didn't know it at the time, this memorable shower was the beginning and the end of our spring rains.

Of course being part of a historic dry spell is an unforgettable thrill. Neither rolling off Niagara falls in a plastic ash can, nor holding an easy-fold lawn chair in a lion taming act can match the action of dry weather ranching.

Whenever the scene changes to one in which hungry animals are rooting into the subsurface of the earth for their livelihood, voltage of the people's excitement glands reach peak power. When the weak and strong alike begin to spend a full hour every morning pulling on their boots, you can safely bet a six-pack against a world tour that the tempo of spine-tingling dry experiences is at full pitch.

The only ones who scoff at drouths are the oldtimers. The grey-muzzled set contends that citizens who save up their oil royalty checks or lay aside their earnings from gold mines never feel the slightest pangs of discomfort during dry weather. According to the veterans' reasoning, it's the people who waste away their lives trafficking in sheep and cows who imagine that drouths are some kind of awful calamity.

To prove their theory, the elders point out that five or six years of bad times are good for the populace. They say that periods of stress and strain cause so many wide variations in a man's blood pressure that free-flowing veins and arteries are as much a part of dry scourges as hair pulling is in the lady wrestling game.

Come to think of it, the old whelps do have a reasonable argument. Back in the terrible, parched days of the '50s, plenty of hombres butted their heads against trees and walls, but I can't recall a single case of circulatory malfunction.

But this isn't saying there weren't all sorts of other miseries. At one time it looked as if every adult Shortgrasser in the country was going to have the acute dry weather talking fits. All the roadways and every outpost were covered by ranchers talking to themselves worse than a bunch of women trying to close down an afternoon bridge session. Far and wide, the attacks of solitary talking fits spread. In the end it became so distracting around the banks and feed stores that Albert Einstein couldn't have added up his own laundry bill.

The throes of those dreadful years are not our problem today, however. As the season changes from this mystic spring to summer, the time is growing close when all of us must decide whether to feed up our capital or chance the market in town. Either alternative seems awful. But living out here has never been like growing moss in the lowlands.